

SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY IN PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION THROUGH PESANTREN RAMADHAN

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Abstract

The Sociocultural Learning Theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky guides educators to pay attention to students' environments and cultural backgrounds in the learning process. This approach aims to make the internalization of learning more effective and meaningful. The implementation of Pesantren Ramadhan activities in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) implicitly reflects the application of this theory. This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study focus. Data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The research subjects included students, teachers, and organizers of the Pesantren Ramadhan program. The findings indicate that the Pesantren Ramadhan activities embody the principles of sociocultural theory. The tilawah (Qur'anic recitation) activity was conducted by empowering peers as facilitators. Discussions and public lectures emphasized social interaction. Various competitions were designed to support students' Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory is concretely implemented in the Pesantren Ramadhan activities. Its application is evident in the recitation, discussion, and competition activities that reinforce social interaction and foster students' potential development.

Keyword: *Socio-cultural Theory; Pesantren Ramadhan; Meaning-full Learning; Implementation*

A. Introduction

Education experts continually strive to address the question of how students can learn effectively and efficiently. Research indicates that each student possesses distinct learning preferences. Some favor visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learning modalities. Others prefer collaborative learning environments, while some are more comfortable learning individually (Utami, 2016). The implementation of Islamic Religious Education is not solely focused on the transmission of knowledge but also emphasizes the transfer of values through role modeling. Consequently, IRE must be adaptive to diverse conditions (Khasanah, 2023). Therefore, the role of the teacher is crucial in optimizing students' potential, preparing them to become resilient Muslim individuals capable of navigating real-life challenges (Arini & Umami, 2019).

One approach employed to support the optimization of students' potential is the utilization of available sociocultural resources, integrating them into the learning process (Ahyani et al., 2021). This approach not only fosters social harmony—an essential foundation for community, national, and state life for the young Muslim generation (Rohman & Hairudin, 2018)—but also supports the broader objectives of Islamic education (Daulay et al., 2020). The Ramadan Pesantren program, a sociocultural tradition within educational institutions, represents an effort to reinforce Islamic religious knowledge and practices by adopting values commonly found in traditional Islamic boarding schools (pondok pesantren). However, it is important to clarify that the Ramadan Pesantren is not a pesantren in the conventional sense. The Ramadan Pesantren is characterized by intensive religious activities conducted during the special period of the month of Ramadan (Dalimunthe, 2020).

The Ramadan Pesantren serves as an innovation derived from cultural practices widely recognized in society, aimed at enhancing Islamic religious education in general schools. Although it does not entirely replicate the structure of a traditional pesantren, the Ramadan Pesantren adopts several common practices found in Islamic boarding schools (Hudaidah & Romelah, 2022). The primary goal of establishing the Ramadan Pesantren is to produce graduates who are devout, moral, intelligent, responsible, and resilient in facing negative influences and the challenges of globalization (Fathoni, 2020).

The process of sociocultural internalization in learning can be implemented within the context of Islamic education. Religious knowledge and its social derivatives are often understood in diverse ways by adherents (Lessy & Rohman, 2022). Learning approaches that accommodate sociocultural aspects help to minimize misunderstandings that could lead to attitudes contrary to the objectives of Islamic education (Mahrus, 2024).

Islamic Religious Education plays a crucial role in shaping students' character and religious identity. This character and identity are strengthened when learning processes are contextualized with sociocultural theory. Sociocultural learning, which emphasizes social interaction, significantly influences how students comprehend and engage in the learning process (Safyalmi, 2023).

Sociocultural learning theory emphasizes that individuals learn with the assistance of others (their social environment) within the zone of proximal development, while taking into account their cultural background. Human intelligence originates from society, environment, and culture, and develops through interpersonal interactions before becoming intrapersonal processes (Moll, 1990).

According to Vygotsky, an individual's thinking process can be understood from the origin of conscious actions formed through social interaction within the context of their life history. The social environment serves as the medium for the transmission and exchange of knowledge, skills, and sociocultural values. Cognitive development is greatly influenced by active engagement in social environments (Slavin, 2008).

The origin of sociocultural theory is most closely associated with the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934). Vygotsky was a prolific writer and gifted researcher who sought to create a new approach to human psychology (Miller, 2011). Vygotsky's thoughts have had a lasting impact on theories of psychology and education to the present day (Driscoll, 2000). His theories are often compared to those of Piaget, although they are regarded as complementary, with Vygotsky placing greater emphasis on sociocultural factors (Miller, 2011).

Several developmental theorists agree that human development is inseparable from social and cultural activities. Mental development processes such as memory, attention, and reasoning involve learning from individuals within one's social environment (Suciati, 2020). Three key concepts of sociocultural theory are: (a) social Interaction: Social interaction is a fundamental aspect of the learning process. Individual abilities develop through two stages: inter-psychological and intra-psychological processes (Hill, 2010). Well-organized learning interactions stimulate children's mental development (Miller, 2011). (b) Language as a Mediation Tool: Language consists of symbols that mediate learning processes. These symbols, as products of the sociocultural environment, assist children in understanding and solving problems (Moll, 1990) (Supratiknya, 2022). Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): The ZPD refers to the distance between an individual's actual developmental level and their potential development. It evolves through interactions with more competent adults or peers (Slavin, 2008). Vygotsky outlined four stages of development within the ZPD, ranging from high dependence to independent and automatic behavior.

Sociocultural theory emphasizes that learning is inherently a social process, where knowledge is constructed through interaction with others and shaped by cultural contexts. In the setting of Pesantren Ramadhan, this theory finds clear application as students engage in collective religious practices, peer discussions, and mentorship under the guidance of ustadz. These social interactions facilitate not only the acquisition of religious knowledge but also the internalization of Islamic values and community norms. Thus, Pesantren Ramadhan serves as an effective environment where learning is deeply rooted in collaborative activities, cultural traditions, and social participation, reflecting the core principles of sociocultural learning theory.

In the application of sociocultural learning theory, teachers play the roles of motivators, facilitators, resource managers, and providers of reinforcement for students' achievements (Sukardjo, 2010). Teachers are required to design learning activities that support students in solving learning problems through assistance rooted in their sociocultural context (Hadis, 2006). Assistance provided by adults or peers will be effective when it aligns with the students' sociocultural backgrounds (Slavin, 2008). According to Rusman (2012), several key aspects of implementing this theory include: learning should foster children's potential, focus on the development of cognitive strategies, and involve the construction of meaning (Rusman, 2012).

Islamic Religious Education plays a crucial role in shaping students' character and religious identity. In the era of globalization, social interaction within learning processes has become a critical factor in understanding and internalizing religious values (Safyalmi, 2023). According to Sukardjo, the application of sociocultural theory within Islamic Religious Education encompasses: Informal Education: Occurs within the family environment as the initial setting for the formation of students' values and behaviors, Non-Formal Education: Based on cultural values, such as traditional art courses that reinforce local identity. Formal Education: For example, Qur'an recitation (tilawah) activities conducted at school, where students are guided by teachers or more proficient peers. Discussions about fasting practices also serve to deepen students' religious understanding (Sukardjo, 2010).

In the processes of character formation, knowledge construction, and value internalization, The Pesantren Ramadan can serve as an alternative model to strengthen Islamic religious education (Ahmad Irfan et al., 2023). Investigating the application of sociocultural theory within the context of pesantren ramadhan is essential, as it provides a deeper understanding that religious education is not merely the transfer of knowledge, but a dynamic process of character formation and the transmission of religious values. Through pesantren ramadhan, the reinforcement of students' religious identity is further strengthened (Kurniawa et al., 2023).

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study method, aiming for an in-depth investigation (Nurrisa & Hermina, 2025) of the application of sociocultural theory in Islamic Religious Education through the Pesantren Ramadhan program. The research was conducted within a school setting, involving participants consisting of students enrolled in the Pesantren Ramadhan program and Islamic Religious Education teachers who acted as organizers. Data collection techniques included participatory observation during the Pesantren Ramadhan activities, in-depth interviews with students and teachers to explore their experiences and perceptions of the learning methods implemented, and document analysis of teaching materials, activity schedules, and records of religious activities (Ardiansyah et al., 2023).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the study applied both source triangulation and methodological triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from students, teachers, and documentation of activities, while methodological triangulation involved the combination of observations, interviews, and document analyses. Additionally, member checking was employed to confirm that the researchers' interpretations aligned with the participants' actual experiences. An audit trail was also established to support the traceability of the entire research process (Rijali, 2019).

Data analysis techniques were carried out in the following stages (Creswell, 2016): Data Reduction; Data obtained from observations, interviews, and document analyses were selected and filtered to retain information relevant to the research focus, namely, the application of sociocultural theory in PAI learning. Data Display; The reduced data were systematically organized into descriptive narratives, tables, and matrices illustrating the relationships between sociocultural concepts and their implementation in learning activities. Conclusion Drawing and Verification: Analysis was conducted by linking field findings with key concepts of sociocultural theory, such as social interaction, the role of language in learning, and the application of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Continuous verification was performed to ensure the consistency and alignment of findings with the theoretical framework.

The relevance to sociocultural theory was emphasized at every stage of the analysis. For instance, interactions between teachers and students during *tilawah* activities or religious discussions were analyzed to identify the processes of social mediation as described in Vygotsky's theory. Mentorship provided by teachers or peers during religious activities was also examined as a concrete application of the ZPD, where students developed religious understanding through structured assistance. Thus, the data analysis was not only descriptive but also interpretative, firmly grounded in the conceptual framework of sociocultural theory.

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Finding

Based on direct observations of the 2025 *Pesantren Ramadan* program, three main activities were identified that reflect the application of Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory principles: group Qur'an recitation, religious discussions (both small group discussions and large-scale public lectures), and religious competitions. These activities demonstrate the involvement of social interaction, mediation processes, and support for students' development within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

a. Group Qur'an Recitation

The Qur'an recitation activity was conducted every morning in groups, with each group led by a student appointed as a mentor. The mentor's role represents a clear form of peer learning and social mediation, where more skilled students guide their peers in proper Qur'anic recitation.

This process aligns with Vygotsky’s concept of social mediation, whereby interaction with more competent individuals enables learners to achieve skills they could not attain independently. The activity also reflects ZPD support, as the mentors serve as scaffolding to help fellow students advance to higher levels of competence.

b. Religious Discussions

Religious discussions were conducted by addressing topics related to *Fiqh Shiyam* (the jurisprudence of fasting). Teachers initiated the sessions based on the students’ prior knowledge and facilitated interactive discussions. In these sessions, the teacher functioned as the mentor, helping to expand the students' understanding through guiding questions and conceptual clarification. This process illustrates the application of ZPD, where students engage in social interactions to construct new meanings from their experiences, supported by teachers who help them move beyond their initial understanding.

c. Religious Competitions

Competitions such as the call to prayer (*azan*), *tartil* (proper Qur'anic recitation), memorization of short surahs, and calligraphy were designed to encourage the development of students' religious skills. These competitions aimed not only to assess actual competencies but also to foster the students' potential development through practice, feedback, and the support of peers and teachers. This is consistent with Vygotsky’s idea that effective learning occurs within the ZPD, where students, with appropriate support, can achieve higher levels of competence than they would independently.

The three main activities of the *Pesantren Ramadan* clearly embody the principles of sociocultural theory. Thus, the *Pesantren Ramadan* is not merely a routine religious activity, but a practical implementation of sociocultural learning theory within the context of Islamic Religious Education.

Table 1. Findings Sociocultural Theory and the Implementation of the Ramadan Pesantren

No.	Ramadan Pesantren Activities	Activity Description	Observed Sociocultural Concepts	Observation Notes
1.	Qur’an Recitation (Tilawah Al-Qur’an)	Students are divided into small groups to recite the Qur’an in a guided manner	Social interaction among students. Peer support as a learning medium	Students who are fluent in recitation help their peers, facilitated by the PAI teacher
2.	Thematic Discussions and General Lectures	Learning fiqh materials and listening to general religious lectures as part of the Ramadan Pesantren	Broad social interaction. Students' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)	Discussions and Q&A sessions occur between students and the speaker

3.	Competitions	Competitions include Azan, Tartil (proper Qur'an recitation), memorization of short surahs, and calligraphy	Social interaction. Support for actual and potential development	Students become enthusiastic and motivated to continue improving their personal potential
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Explanation of the Table:

The Quran recitation activity was conducted every morning, with students divided into small groups. Each group was led by a student appointed as a mentor, who guided their peers in reciting the Quran correctly. This concept reflects the application of peer learning and social mediation within the context of Islamic religious education. In the context of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, the mentor's role in the group serves as a scaffolding that supports students in progressing beyond their current abilities. This process aligns with Vygotsky's idea that effective learning occurs when students interact with more competent individuals— in this case, a peer who is more proficient in Quran recitation. The thematic discussions and public lectures focusing on *Fiqh Shiyam* (the jurisprudence of fasting) allowed students to interact directly with the presenter and their peers. During these discussions, the teacher acted as a mentor or facilitator, helping students understand religious concepts through challenging questions and clarifications of the material.

This process is closely linked to the concept of ZPD, where teacher-student interaction helps to build new understandings. The social interaction during these discussions assists students in moving beyond their initial understanding, which, according to Vygotsky's theory, is the most effective form of learning. This discussion activates students' ZPD, involving them in active learning that requires guidance and support from the teacher.

The competitions, such as the *azan* (call to prayer), *tartil* (proper Quran recitation), short surah memorization, and calligraphy, were designed to encourage students to reach both their actual and potential development. These activities not only assess the skills students already possess but also provide opportunities for further growth with feedback and support from peers and teachers.

In the context of Vygotsky's theory, the social support provided by peers and teachers functions as a facilitator, helping students progress within their ZPD. With appropriate guidance, students can surpass their initial capabilities and reach higher levels of performance than they would be able to achieve independently.

2. Discussion

The implementation of the Pesantren Ramadhan program in schools serves not only as a spiritual reinforcement initiative but also as a medium for applying sociocultural learning principles within Islamic education. One of its main activities is guided Qur'an recitation (Tilawah Al-Qur'an), where students are organized into small groups to read the

Qur'an collectively. This activity promotes peer-assisted learning and meaningful social interaction. More proficient students assist their peers under the supervision of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers, reflecting the role of peer mediation and collaborative learning as core components of sociocultural theory (Muflikhun et al., 2025).

The implementation of Pesantren Ramadhan as a sociocultural learning medium has demonstrated high effectiveness in enhancing students' social, cognitive, and religious engagement. The annual program emphasizes that integrating social interaction within Islamic Education (PAI) learning processes can accelerate the internalization of religious values through dialogical and community-based approaches. In the context of Pesantren Ramadhan, peer interactions during Qur'anic recitation and fiqh discussions illustrate how social-based learning can expand students' cognitive domains and expedite the development of Islamic character (Safyalmi, 2023). Moreover, implementing Pesantren Ramadhan through the sociocultural learning framework has proven effective in shaping students' character. As noted by Romi Kurniawan (2023), the Pesantren Ramadhan program assists students in understanding Islamic teachings and enhancing their awareness of moral values embedded within religious teachings (Kurniawa et al., 2023). More specifically, Abd. Aziz Muslim Al Fathoni (2020) identifies three key character outcomes resulting from the Pesantren Ramadhan activities: social skills development, personality growth, and strengthening of faith (Fathoni, 2020).

Furthermore, the three main activities of Pesantren Ramadhan offer new alternatives for teachers, particularly Islamic Education teachers, to diversify the implementation of sociocultural learning strategies. These practices are crucial for strengthening students' spiritual development (Suroso et al., 2022). Activities such as group-based Qur'an recitation encourage meaningful social interactions and peer mediation, aligning with Vygotsky's theory of collaborative learning and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Thematic discussions and lectures on fiqh, especially regarding fasting, provide opportunities for students to connect new knowledge with their prior understanding through social dialogue. Additionally, competitions in areas such as adhan (call to prayer), tartil (melodious recitation), memorization of short surahs, and Islamic calligraphy foster healthy competition, self-expression, and social participation, enriching students' cultural and religious growth. Overall, the Pesantren Ramadhan program exemplifies the application of sociocultural learning theory within Islamic education.

E. Conclusion

Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory provides a strong conceptual framework for understanding how students develop knowledge and skills through social interactions within their cultural and religious contexts. The practice of Pesantren Ramadhan in schools reflects a concrete application of this theory, emphasizing the role of social interaction, peer and teacher mediation, and support within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The findings show that religious collaborative activities, teacher scaffolding, and religious competition are able to promote students' cognitive, social, and spiritual development in an

integrated manner. The practical implication is that Islamic education needs to design learning programs that are more participatory, contextual, and adaptive to students' socio-cultural dynamics.

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